



**SEIUHealthcare.**  
United for Quality Care

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Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee, my name is Denice Panella and I am a RN at a long term care facility in Colchester. I have been employed there for 20 years. I am a dedicated, loyal employee to a company that couldn't care less about me and my co-workers. I am here today to shed some light on the current long term care staffing crisis in Connecticut and explain why people are leaving the industry.

Way before Covid was even a thought, I urged the State to fund these facilities for better staffing and to change the staff to patient ratios. The second the pandemic hit Connecticut, the workers of retirement age finally retired and those employees not vested never returned. It was the employees with the longevity that have remained and suffered. We continue to show up during a pandemic with no compensation or appreciation, risking our lives while everyone else runs the other way, including Management.

Due to the pandemic, we went from a building that once was employed with over 200 workers to being left with less than 80. This is nowhere near enough to provide care for 3 shifts a day, but the admissions keep on coming and no one else is coming to work in these facilities. The starting wages are too low for double the workload that is now expected. Mandating was something that we used to see only during blizzards, but has now become the new normal, and is used to fill the schedule on a regular day. Staff are being mandated at least 5 times a week. This is unacceptable! We choose the shifts we work for a reason, whether that means we have other jobs, we take care of our elderly parents at home, or we have to take care of our own children. We are now being told that we will not be allowed to take vacation time or personal days. We do not deserve time off to care for our own wellbeing? We earned that time! Why is that too much to ask? When we try to leave, we are threatened and told that DPH will be called and we will be reported for job abandonment. We are not abandoning our jobs because we worked our scheduled shift, our Employers are abandoning us by refusing to raise wages so that we can attract new hires.

When schools were not open and my son needed to be homeschooled, my employer refused to accommodate my hours, so I gave up my full-time position and went per diem. This way I could make my own schedule and be there for my son. Then the company decided to fill open positions with agency staff. I was told that the agency staff could no longer sign up day to day, but that they needed to be given full-time positions by signing monthly contracts. So let me get this straight: the company that claims to have no money is willing to pay a stranger \$60-\$100 an hour to come and go as they please, but are not willing to pay me a penny more or accommodate a schedule for me so that I can continue to deliver care like I have for the last 20 years.

How are these companies being allowed to misuse funds and not be held accountable? How are they allowed to pay strangers to come care for our residents, but cannot pay the dedicated, loyal staff that have worked there for years, and know our residents. Now the company is saying that they spent too much money on the agency staff and will no longer use them, so instead they will go back to abusing us. We are on the verge of leaving because we are overworked, underpaid, and tired of being abused. It is not a rewarding feeling, knowing that you are being set up for failure and cannot provide quality care. These residents are suffering and it is heartbreaking. Imagine it was your mother, father, or even you. We need to do better.

We need funding so we can attract and retain new staff, or we are doomed. Thank you for your time.